



NEWS RELEASE

EUROPE REGIONAL MEDICAL COMMAND

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Breathe a sigh of relief; asthma doesn't have to take your breath away

By Staff Sgt. Kelly Bridgwater
Europe Regional Medical Command Public Affairs

HEIDELBERG, Germany – Your chest feels tight. You cannot stop coughing and have trouble breathing. You feel like you aren't getting enough air into your lungs no matter how hard you try. Welcome to the world of asthma.

"People typically think of asthma as an asthma attack, a sudden onset of wheezing or coughing," explained Dr. (Lt. Col.) Stephen N. Marks, allergist, Landstuhl Regional Medical Center. "The reality is that asthma is a chronic inflammatory condition of the airways and lungs that is usually quiet. However, at certain times a person may experience coughing, wheezing or shortness of breath," he said.

You may not even know you have asthma.

"There is no specific test for diagnosing asthma," said Marks. The Centers for Disease Control's website says that asthma can be difficult to diagnose, especially in children under five years old. Regular physical exams and specialized tests that include lung function tests and allergy tests can help make the right diagnosis. Lung function tests are not reliable for children under the age of five. "That adds to the difficulty in making the diagnosis," he added.

Spirometry is the lung function test that measures the air capacity of the lungs. A piece of equipment called a spirometer measures the largest amount of air you can exhale after taking a deep breath both before and after you use an asthma medication.

According to the CDC, having a family history of asthma, allergies, or eczema contributes to a person's tendency to develop asthma. In most cases, the cause of developing asthma is unknown, and at this time, there is no cure. Early diagnosis is the key to controlling asthma and can help prevent permanent damage to the airways.

Military healthcare providers follow clinical practice guidelines (CPGs) when diagnosing children and adults with asthma and when choosing their treatment. These guidelines specify consistent care for the beneficiary no matter which military treatment facility is used. CPGs include an educational element that teaches parents and children how to recognize “triggers”.

“Smoking, respiratory viruses, and irritants such as cold temperatures, dust, perfume, or heavy odors, as well as physical exertion, are common asthma triggers,” said Marks. “Children are more inclined to get asthma if there is smoking in the house where they live.”

Treating asthma involves using prescribed daily medications, called “controller” medications, and avoiding known triggers, such as smoke and dusty dwellings. It is also critical to visit your healthcare provider for routine check-ups and to remove known triggers from your environment since they can cause an attack.

“It is important that people don’t restrict their interests due to having asthma,” said Marks. “Children and teens should be able to take part in all types of activities.” Early diagnosis, the correct treatment, and individual management of triggers make that possible.

For more information about asthma, visit the CDC Web address at <http://www.cdc.gov/asthma>.

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Sidebar to Asthma story

The following information is from the Centers for Disease Control website.

Important Asthma Triggers

Outdoor Air Pollution

Pollution caused by industrial emissions and automobile exhaust can cause an asthma episode. In large cities that have air pollution problems the number of emergency department visits for asthma episodes goes up when the air quality is very poor.

Cockroach Allergen

You may find cockroaches any place where food is eaten and crumbs are left behind. Decreasing exposure to cockroaches in the home can help reduce asthma attacks. Remove as many water and food sources as you can because cockroaches need food and water to survive. Vacuum or sweep these areas at least every two to three days. You can also use roach traps or gels to decrease the number of cockroaches in your home.

Pets

Furry pets may trigger an attack. The simplest solution to this situation is to find another home for the pet. However, some pet owners may be too attached to their pets or unable to locate a safe new home for the animal. Any animal causing an allergic reaction should not be allowed in the

bedroom. Pets should be kept outside as much as possible and bathed weekly. People with asthma are not allergic to their pet's fur, so trimming the pet's fur will not help your asthma. Frequent vacuuming will reduce the presence of the allergen. If the room has a hard surface floor, it should be damp mopped weekly.

Mold

When mold is inhaled, it can cause asthma attacks. Eliminating mold throughout the home can help control asthma attacks. Keep humidity levels between 35 and 50 percent. In hot, humid climates, this may require the use of air conditioning and, or dehumidifiers. Fixing water leaks and cleaning up any mold in the home can also help.

Other Triggers

Strenuous physical exercise; adverse weather conditions like freezing temperatures, high humidity, and thunderstorms; and some foods and food additives and drugs can trigger asthma episodes. Strong emotional states also can lead to hyperventilation and an asthma episode. People with asthma should learn their "triggers" and avoid them when possible.